Professional Learning Communities

An Infrastructure for Dropout Prevention and School Improvement

D’Ette Cowan and Ann Neeley
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How serious is the dropout problem?

- Almost 1/3 of public high school students fail to graduate each year.
- Globally, U.S. ranks 17th in high school graduation rates.
- Every school day, 7,000 students leave high school.
- Students from low-income families 6 times more likely to drop out.

Characteristics of Struggling Schools

• Extremely low standards and expectations for students
• Very little use of data to identify and solve specific problems
• Limited capacity for implementing improvement efforts
• Little staff interest in quality instruction
• Less experienced, less qualified teachers and other instructional staff
Characteristics of Struggling Schools

- High staff absenteeism and turnover rates
- Inadequate leadership for substantive change
- Atmosphere of distrust, disrespect, and barely controlled chaos
- Low morale


What We Will Learn Today

• What is and what is not a professional learning community (PLC)
• How PLCs use research and data to address dropout prevention
• What leadership actions support PLCs in focusing on dropout prevention
• How to access and use tools, resources, and interventions to build a PLC that supports dropout prevention
A Professional Learning Community IS NOT —

an end in itself
A Professional Learning Community IS — an infrastructure, or an internal support system, for achieving shared goals for students
What’s the Difference?

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Teams
Professional Learning Community Dimensions

- Shared values and vision
- Shared and supportive leadership
- Collective learning
- Supportive conditions
  - Structures
  - Relationships
- Shared personal practice

Shared Values and Vision

• The shared mission and goals that the staff see as their common purpose

• A mental image of what is important to the organization and its individuals

• An unrelenting attention to student learning success

Shared Values and Vision

• Attendance
  – Absenteeism rate

• Course performance
  – Course failures
  – Grade-point average
  – On-track indicators
Shared Values and Vision

- Attendance
  - Absenteeism
    - Number of days absent during first 20 days and in each quarter of first year of high school
Shared Values and Vision

• Course performance
  – Course failures
    • Number of Fs in any semester-long course during first year
  – Grade-point average
    • GPA for each semester and cumulative GPA
  – On-track indicators
    • Combination of the number of Fs in core academic courses and credits earned during the first year of high school
Shared Values and Vision

Tools:

• Interviews
• Surveys
• Rubrics
• Facilitated conversations
Shared and Supportive Leadership

- Shared decision making, but principal leadership remains highly relevant
- New way of thinking on part of principals and staff
- Open discussion of instructional problems and exploration of solutions

Shared and Supportive Leadership

• Communicates clear expectations
• Builds capacity
• Monitors and reviews progress
Implementation Bridge

Intentional Collective Learning and Its Application

• What the community determines to learn and how they will learn it in order to address students’ learning needs is the bottom line.

Intentional Collective Learning and Its Application

- Data can be collected on students’ dropout potential using the Early Warning Data System (EWDS)

http://txcc.sedl.org/resources/ewst/

The Early Warning System (EWS) Tool was originally developed by the National High School Center (NHSC) at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to automatically calculate high-yield indicators related to dropout. With permission of and in collaboration with the NHSC, the Texas Comprehensive Center (TXCC) at SEDL adapted the EWS to produce an online customized database version of the tool called the Early Warning Data System (EWDS).
Intentional Collective Learning and Its Application

Note: The names and data in this chart are fictitious.
Intentional Collective Learning and Its Application

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Intentional Collective Learning and Its Application

### Intervention Tracker - Categories

Intervention types (or categories) are used to categorize student interventions into groups. Each category is then summarized to show student performance outcomes across the duration of the intervention period. Click the category icon to view a summary of interventions within that group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th># INTERVENTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>Various tutoring programs around math, reading, and science.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Mentors are required to attend 4 hours of training and maintain weekly contact with their mentees.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>Individual, group, and family counseling will be delivered as needed.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance monitoring</td>
<td>The attendance clerk will compare absences daily with her Liaison List and write daily the Community.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>Regular contact and monthly meetings with a variety of social services will enhance the</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Supportive Conditions: Structures

• Structural factors provide the physical requirements:
  – time
  – place to meet for community work
  – resources and policies to support collaboration

Supportive Conditions: Structures
Supportive Conditions: Structures
Supportive Conditions: Relationships

Relational factors support the community’s
– human and interpersonal development,
– openness,
– truth telling, and
– focusing on attitudes of respect and caring among the members.
Supportive Conditions: Relationships

- **Norm**
  - You are responsible for your students and your subject.
  - Find efficient teaching routines and methods, and stick with them.
  - Be wary of changes in curriculum and instruction: these too shall pass.

- **Translation**
  - Don’t tread on other teachers’ territory.
  - Avoid change.
  - Students and society will always have the same basic needs so ignore the new-fangled stuff.
Supportive Conditions: Relationships

• “If they (teachers) related to me more and understand that at that point in time, my life was …what I was going through, where I lived, where I came from. Who knows?”

Shared Person Practice

• Review of teacher’s practice and instructional behaviors by colleagues to facilitate continuous improvement

• Built on mutual respect and trust
Shared Person Practice

Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle (PTLC)
Shared Person Practice

Tools:

• Lesson study
• Examination of student work
• Classroom visits
• Book studies
Interventions for Dropout Prevention

1. Catch-up courses
2. Equal access to rigorous coursework
3. Extended learning time
4. Multiple paths to graduation; time and location options
5. Tutoring
6. Block scheduling
7. 8th to 9th grade transition programs
8. Homeroom system
9. Ninth-grade academies
10. Small learning communities

Interventions for Dropout Prevention

- Verifying **implementation** for each intervention
- Verifying **impact** for each intervention
Interventions for Dropout Prevention

Tutoring example for verifying implementation:

1. Determine tutee attendance and demographics
2. Determine alignment of the curriculum to the goal
3. Determine the impact of the instructional techniques
4. Determine the extent of collaboration with course teachers
Interventions for Dropout Prevention

Tutoring example for verifying impact:

1. Determine the goal:
   - To improve grades or
   - To improve test scores or . . .

2. Determine the data

3. Determine the frequency of data review

4. Determine staff and others who will review the data and adjust the intervention, if needed
Dimensions of Professional Learning Communities

• Shared values and vision
• Shared and supportive leadership
• Collective learning
• Supportive conditions
  – Structures
  – Relationships
• Shared personal practice

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<th>STATEMENTS</th>
<th>SCALE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shared and Supportive Leadership</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.</td>
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<td>2. The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.</td>
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<td>3. Staff members have accessibility to key information.</td>
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<td>4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.</td>
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<td>5. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.</td>
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<td>6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.</td>
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<td>7. The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.</td>
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<td>8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.</td>
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<td>9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.</td>
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<td>10. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.</td>
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<td>11. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.</td>
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**COMMENTS:**
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